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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5249
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0679

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 001680

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2016

TAGS: PREL CD FR

SUBJECT: CHAD: FRENCH OFFER FEW COMMENTS ON UNSUCCESSFUL COUP

REF: NDJAMENA 418

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: French response to the thwarted coup attempt in Chad, both from the GOF and in the press, has been muted. Isabelle Guisnel (deputy to the DAS-equivalent for West Africa at the MFA) said that France remained vigilant but that the attempted coup had produced little visible disruption in Ndjamena. The MFA gave an anodyne response to a question on Chad in its March 15 briefing (para 5), and press reporting has been sparse. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The March 14-15 unsuccessful coup in Chad (reftel) has not generated a strong response in France, at least on this "day after." Isabelle Guisnel, who is the deputy to DAS-equivalent for West Africa Bruno Foucher at the MFA, said on March 16 that France remained vigilant and was concerned about this attempt but that it appeared that normal daily life in Ndjamena had not been affected. She referred to reports she had received from France's Embassy in Chad that were consistent with information contained in reftel. Guisnel noted that there were often rumors, some credible and some not, of coup plots in Chad. This case was obviously a serious one but the Deby government had intervened in a successful manner. She said that the GOF would continue to follow the situation in Chad closely, expressing her own willingness to stay in contact with us concerning developments.

¶3. (SBU) Initial press reporting in the major Paris dailies has been minimal, with Liberation and Le Figaro on March 16 running short (respectively, one and two paragraphs) on the fact of the attempt but without analysis.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: While the attempted coup is likely to generate additional official and press commentary, we are struck by the relatively low-key French response in its immediate aftermath, especially given the strong French concerns, frequently expressed to the USG, about the stability of the Deby regime and the lack of a credible alternative to Deby. This relative silence may represent relief that something worse did not happen. END COMMENT.

¶5. (U) The MFA on March 15 responded to a question on Chad during its daily briefing. Embassy informal translation of the exchange follows:

-- QUESTION: An attempted coup d'etat against Chad President Idriss Deby Itno took place during the night of Tuesday-Wednesday in Ndjamena, led by security forces. What details do you have on the perpetrators of the coup and on the manner in which it took place? What is your reaction?

-- ANSWER: We have in effect been informed by Chadian authorities that an attempted coup d'etat took place yesterday in Ndjamena.

-- We are following the situation with the greatest vigilance, especially in view of the fact that Chad is dealing with a difficult situation relating to the crisis in Darfur.

-- I recall to you our principle of condemning all attempts to seize power through non-democratic means, notably by the use of force.

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Stapleton